

Newly Displayed Portraits in Senate Chamber Honor Welcome, Miller

By **Josh Kurtz** - January 14, 2020



A portrait of former Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. now hangs in the neighborhood of Samuel Chase, a signer of Declaration of Independence. Photo by Josh Kurtz

There were two new portraits put on display in the Senate chamber Monday night — and it came as a surprise to some of the principals involved.

New Senate President Bill Ferguson (D-Baltimore City) quietly arranged to honor two giants of Senate history: Verda Welcome, the first African-American woman to be elected as a state senator anywhere in the U.S., and Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., Ferguson's predecessor.

"We've got a bit of a special evening," Ferguson told his colleagues.

As lawmakers entered the Senate chamber Monday night, two red velvet curtains adorned the back wall, where portraits of two former governors, John Smith (who served from 1900-1904) and Edwin Warfield (1904-1908), had hung for 115 years.

Ferguson explained that a visit to the State House from students in his district four years earlier had inspired him to make the portraits hanging in the Senate chamber more representative of Maryland. One student wrote to Ferguson that not seeing anyone on the walls who looked like her "made me sad."



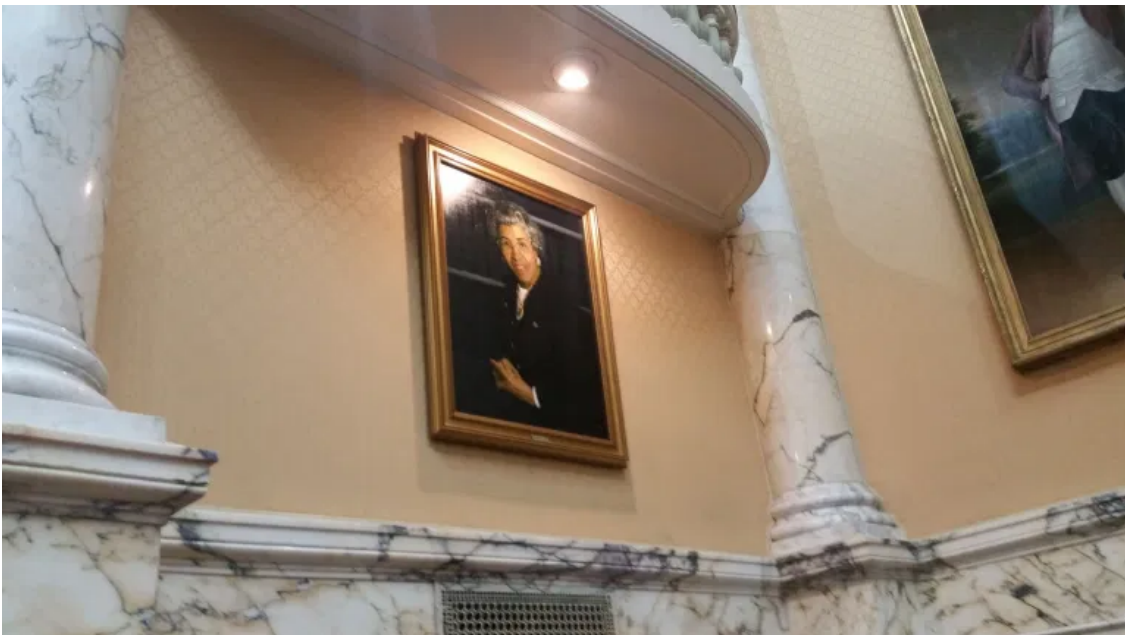
Mary Sue Welcome, daughter of the late state Sen. Verda Welcome, chats with Yaakov "Jake" Weissmann, chief of staff to Senate President Bill Ferguson. Photo by Josh Kurtz

With that, the curtain was lifted on the portrait of Welcome, which had been hanging in a Senate office building for several years, where a meeting room is named for her.

Welcome was elected to the House of Delegates in 1958, and then represented Baltimore City in the Senate from 1963 to 1983. She died in 1990 at the age of 83.

Welcome's daughter, Mary Sue Welcome, a former prosecutor and businesswoman, was invited to attend the Senate session but was not told why.

"This is absolutely amazing," she said, recalling how male and how white the Senate chamber was when she was a girl.



A portrait of the late state Sen. Verda Welcome now hangs in the Senate chamber. It is the first picture of an African-American to be displayed in either legislative chamber in Annapolis. Photo by Josh Kurtz

Despite her place in history and her long record of accomplishments, Verda Welcome "knew how to be humble," her daughter said. "She has 15 [siblings] in her family. She knew how to work as a team and how to get things done. But she also knew how

to be humble and how to be grateful.”

Mary Sue Welcome also said her mother would enjoy her new perch in the Senate chamber.

“If every once in a while you feel a little tap on your shoulder, don’t worry about it,” Welcome told the senators. “It’s only Mother saying if you have a doubt about which way to go, follow your heart.”

After the viewing of the Welcome portrait, three generations of Millers, looking a little like a modern-day version of the Von Trapp family, burst into the Senate chamber and took a long row of seats at the front of the room.

“I think we have a good idea of who the next portrait will be, so it won’t be much of a reveal,” Ferguson said, sheepishly.

With at least a dozen former senators also crowding into the chamber, Miller’s portrait, painted in 2002 and hanging in the lobby of the James Senate Office Building for several years, was unveiled.

Miller choked up, and then, as he so often does, began to describe the history of the two governors whose portraits were being replaced.

“It’s remarkable,” he said, his voice cracking.

The portrait of the 33-year Senate leader, who has served in the chamber since 1975, is no more than 10 feet away from the desk where Miller now sits on the floor.

“I’m going to have to be on my good behavior, aren’t I?” Miller mused. “Because I’m going to be looking down at me.”

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Co-founder and Editor Josh Kurtz is the leading chronicler of Maryland politics and government. He began covering the State House in 1995 for *The Gazette* newspapers, and has been writing about state and local politics ever since. He later became an editor at *Roll Call*, the Capitol Hill newspaper, and spent eight years at *E&E News*, an online subscription-only publisher of news websites covering energy and environmental issues. For seven of those years, he led a staff of 20 reporters at *E&E Daily*, which covers energy and environmental policy on Capitol Hill and in national politics. For 6 1/2 years he wrote a weekly column on state politics for *Center Maryland* and has written for several other Maryland publications as well. Kurtz has given speeches and appeared on TV and radio shows about Maryland politics through the years.